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REPORT OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN*

(Beijing, 4-15 September 1995)

Addendum

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* The present document contains annexes I to IV of the report of the Fourth World Conference on Women. The complete report will be issued as a United Nations sales publication.

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Annex I

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Symbol	Title or description
A/CONF.177/1	Provisional agenda
A/CONF.177/2	Provisional rules of procedure: note by the Secretariat
A/CONF.177/3	Organizational and procedural matters: note by the Secretariat
A/CONF.177/4	Second review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women: note by the Secretariat
A/CONF.177/5	1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: note by the Secretariat
A/CONF.177/6	Update of The World's Women: Trends and Statistics: note by the Secretariat
A/CONF.177/7	Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
A/CONF.177/8	Results of the regional conferences and other international conferences: note by the Secretariat
A/CONF.177/9	The extent to which gender concerns have been included in the activities of the United Nations human rights mechanisms: report of the Secretary-General
A/CONF.177/10	Preliminary report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, and Plan of Action for the Elimination of Harmful Traditional Practices affecting the Health of Women and Children: note by the Secretariat
A/CONF.177/11	Letter dated 2 September 1995 from the Chairperson of the Fourth Ministerial Conference of Non-Aligned Countries Devoted to the Role of Women in Development addressed to the Secretary-General
A/CONF.177/12	Note by the Secretariat transmitting decision 18/6 of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme
A/CONF.177/13	Platform for action: note by the Secretary-General
A/CONF.177/14	Report of the Credentials Committee

Symbol	Title or description
A/CONF.177/15	Note by the Secretariat relating to the report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning the release of women and children who have been taken hostage in areas of armed conflicts
A/CONF.177/16	Letter dated 12 September 1995 from the Leader of the delegation of China to the Fourth World Conference on Women addressed to the Secretary-General of the Conference, transmitting the Beijing Parliamentary Declaration, adopted on 7 September 1995 by the participants in Parliamentarians' Day, organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union on the occasion of the Fourth World Conference on Women*
A/CONF.177/17	Note verbale dated 12 September 1995 from the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Beijing addressed to the Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women
A/CONF.177/18	Note verbale dated 14 September 1995 from the delegation of France to the Fourth World Conference on Women addressed to the secretariat of the Conference
A/CONF.177/19	Letter dated 14 September 1995 from the Ambassador of Turkey to the People's Republic of China addressed to the Secretary-General
A/CONF.177/L.1	Draft platform for action and proposals for consideration in the preparation of a draft declaration: note by the Secretary-General
A/CONF.177/L.2	Report of the informal contact group on gender: note by the Secretariat
A/CONF.177/L.3	Report of the informal consultations convened by the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women: note by the Secretary-General
A/CONF.177/L.4	Report of the pre-Conference consultations held at the Beijing International Convention Centre
A/CONF.177/L.5 and Add.1-3, Add.3/Corr.1, Add.4 and 5, Add.5/Corr.1, Add.6, Add.6/Corr.1, Add.7 and 8, Add.8/Corr.1, Add.9, Add.9/Corr.1, Add.10 and 11, Add.11/Corr.1, Add.12, Add.12/Corr.1,	Report of the Main Committee

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* The Head of the delegation of Egypt also submitted a letter requesting circulation of the Beijing Parliamentary Declaration.

Symbol	Title or description
Add.13, Add.13/Corr.1, Add.14, Add.14/Corr.1, Add.15, Add.15/Corr.1, Add.16 and 17, Add.17/Corr.1 and Add.18-21	
A/CONF.177/L.6	Programme budget implications of recommendations contained in the Platform for Action: statement submitted by the Secretary-General in accordance with rule 15 of the rules of procedure of the Conference and General Assembly resolution 46/189, section IV
A/CONF.177/L.7 and Add.1 (Parts I and II)	Draft report of the Conference
A/CONF.177/L.8	Expression of thanks to the people and Government of the People's Republic of China: draft resolution submitted by the Philippines on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Group of 77
A/CONF.177/L.9	Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: draft resolution submitted by the Philippines on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Group of 77
A/CONF.177/INF/1 and Corr.1	Information for participants

Annex II

OPENING STATEMENTS

Statement by Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Secretary-General of the United Nations*

My first words are words of welcome: welcome to all of you. I wish you every success in your deliberations and in your work.

Secondly, words of thanks: on behalf of the international community and of all of us present today, I thank the Government and people of China for their generous and gracious hospitality.

It is both fitting, and significant, that China is host to this historic global Conference.

China is, of course, a permanent member of the Security Council. China takes part, therefore, in the work of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security. By welcoming us all here this week, China is making clear its intention to play its full part in the international community across the entire range of its most important work. I see this Conference, therefore, as cementing a new era in the relationship between China and the United Nations.

This is an important milestone on the road to the future. China has the resources, both natural and human, to contribute significantly to global progress. China has the ability to take an active and enthusiastic part in the Organization's work towards sustainable development, particularly in Africa.

Without the full and active support and participation of China, the United Nations cannot act as a truly universal forum. China's decision to be the host for this major event in modern life is a symbol of its future place in the world and that of all the nations of Asia within the international community.

Madame President, I ask you to convey to all the Chinese people our message of thanks and appreciation.

Thanks are also due to the delegations of Member States. This Conference is the product of many years of hard preparatory work. I know what a great effort you have undertaken to make this Conference a success.

And thanks are due to the organizers of this Conference. In particular, we thank the Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Gertrude Mongella, and her team.

This global conference is unique: It brings a new universality, and therefore a new legitimacy, to the deliberations of the international community. Gathered here is a deep and rich representation of Governments, of women's groups and of the organizations of civil society.

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* The statement was made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on behalf of the Secretary-General.

There is evidence here, in all its diversity and vibrancy, of the new partnership in international life that has been forged between governmental and non-governmental organizations. We see here the new legitimacy of the organizations of civil society as actors on the international scene.

The effectiveness of our work - both here, and in the future - will depend to a considerable extent on our willingness to be open and receptive to ideas and suggestions coming from those organizations.

This is a historic gathering: not only because of its membership and participation, but also because of the subject of our discussions.

Securing the equality of women and men, in law and in fact, is the great political project of the twentieth century. A crucial role in the realization of that project has been entrusted to the United Nations. We are meeting to take that great enterprise forward into the twenty-first century and beyond: to consolidate the legal advances, to build on the political understandings and to commit ourselves to action.

As the millennium approaches, we look back over a century of unprecedented social and political change on our planet. No country, no people, has been untouched by its great upheavals. Some have already concluded that the twentieth century was a dark age in the history of humanity. No one can deny that its wars, its struggles, were characterized by great violence and enormous human suffering. But out of that suffering came also a new spirit - a spirit of hope - and a resolve that there should be change.

The founding of the United Nations, 50 years ago, was one achievement of that new spirit. Then, the world looked back: to seek the lessons to be learned, and the mistakes to be avoided, after the cataclysm of world war. And the world looked forward - not simply to reconstruct a shattered international community, but to build a new and better one.

Recognition of the dignity and worth of women, and of the essential contribution of women, on an equal basis with men, to life in all its aspects, was to be an essential element of that better world.

Thus, in the Charter of the United Nations, States made a clear commitment to the rights of women:

> "... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women ...".

This was more than a statement of high ideals about the world of the future. It was a commitment to ensuring that men and women have and enjoy the same rights. And - unlike any other commitment made in the Charter - this was a commitment that could be measured.

And it pointed the way forward in other ways, too. That commitment was included in the Charter because women's non-governmental organizations worked with government representatives to put it there.

The then First Lady of the United States - Eleanor Roosevelt - was instrumental in that process.

Since its very founding, the United Nations has actively encouraged Member States to honour their commitment.

In the early years, from 1945 to 1962, the United Nations concentrated on securing equality for women under the law. In 1946, the General Assembly established the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948. In these ways, the United Nations sought to build on the legal basis for the equality of women set forth in the Charter.

In a second phase, from 1963 to 1975, the international community began to recognize the importance of development in achieving the advancement of women. The focus of the Organization's work included the economic and social realities of women's daily lives. In 1967, the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was adopted.

In 1975, the first global conference on the status of women was convened in Mexico City. It proclaimed 1975 as International Women's Year. The Conference led to the elucidation of a three-part theme - equality, development and peace. This became the basis of the Organization's work in the years that followed, and is the basis of our work today.

Between 1976 and 1985, the United Nations observed a Decade for Women. The Decade was the third phase of United Nations work for women. This period brought the crucial new recognition of women as active agents of, and contributors to, the development process.

1979 was a landmark year. That year, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It was the first international legal instrument to define discrimination against women. It was, in other words, an international bill of human rights for women. But it also stressed the importance of action, including action in the fields of employment and education, to ensure women's progress in fact as well as in law.

The Decade for Women's major conferences - Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 - offered a forum in which women's organizations had a voice in shaping the work of the United Nations. The Decade also brought agreement on the need for practical measures to improve women's lives.

The adoption of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the year 2000 was another milestone in the advancement of women. The Strategies included guidelines for national measures to promote women's participation in efforts to promote peace, and education for peace. They singled out for special attention the need for measures to help women in special situations of distress.

Over the past decade we have seen a fourth phase of United Nations activity for women. A continuum of global conferences has worked to define the new global agenda. These conferences have made it clear that no progress is possible without the full and equal participation of women and men: in promoting peace, in safeguarding the environment, in securing sustainable development, in human rights, in population, in health, in education, in government, in the home and in civil society.

The 1990 World Summit for Children established goals for health, education and nutrition for women and children.

The role of women in safeguarding the environment, and in promoting sustainable development, was recognized at the United Nations Conference on

Environment and Development, held at Rio de Janeiro. Women were seen as having a central role in implementing Agenda 21.

The Vienna World Conference on Human Rights reaffirmed the universality of human rights. It was understood that women should exercise the same rights as men on the basis of equality.

The Cairo International Conference on Population and Development recognized the central role of women in population and development. Its consensus language reflected a concept of reproductive rights that is firmly based on human rights instruments. It also set forth the linkage between women's empowerment and development.

The World Summit for Social Development, meeting at Copenhagen in 1995, adopted a Declaration and Programme of Action. One of its central principles was the full integration and participation of women in spurring social development and eradicating poverty.

Today, we celebrate 50 years of unceasing effort, spearheaded by the United Nations, to advance the cause of women.

One of the themes of our Conference is equality. Equality before the law is being achieved in many countries. But equality in fact remains an elusive goal in all countries. Equality of dignity is far from being achieved, with discrimination on the basis of gender still widespread. Real and concrete steps are still required - to ensure equality of opportunity in education, and equality of access to health systems, to jobs and to political power.

Women work longer hours for less pay and in lower status jobs than men in almost every country. Seventy per cent of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty in the world are women. Women and their dependent children form the majority of the 23 million refugees and 26 million internally displaced persons in the world.

When the Charter was signed, no State had elected a woman as head of State or Government. Since then, a total of 24 women have been elected to head States or Governments. But there is far to go before we have equality between women and men in senior government posts.

In 1994, there were no women ministers in 25 States. Overall, only 5.7 per cent of the world's cabinet ministers were women. In no country were women in the majority as elected members of parliament.

There were exceptions: in Sweden there was parity between men and women in ministerial posts. The Caribbean is the only region where more than 20 per cent of senior government officials are women.

In the United Nations itself, progress is being made. As Secretary-General, I have appointed women to head several United Nations programmes, bringing the total number of women executive heads to five.

The General Assembly took a historic step recently when it elected the first woman judge to the International Court of Justice.

I have given clear instructions that the goals of the Charter for gender equality in the United Nations itself should be strictly followed. I have approved action plans within the Organization to foster a gender-sensitive

working environment and to ensure that the Organization addresses the gender aspects in all its work.

The role of women in peace is another theme of this Conference. In United Nations peace missions, women remain a largely untapped resource. Missions should be designed to take account of the extraordinary potential of women in crisis situations.

Violence against women seems to be increasing. It should receive the unanimous and firm condemnation of the entire international community.

National studies in 10 countries estimate that between 17 per cent and 38 per cent of women have been physically assaulted by a partner. An estimated 100 million girls suffer genital mutilation.

More women are today suffering directly from the effects of war and conflict than ever before in history. There is a deplorable trend towards the organized humiliations of women, including the crime of mass rape.

We will press for international legal action against those who perpetrate organized violence against women in time of conflict.

Another theme of this Conference is development. The international community has recognized the great potential of women as agents of consensus and peaceful change. The challenge is to harness the energy, ideas and skills of women, not only in the rebuilding of formerly war-torn societies, but also in promoting conditions of economic and social development generally.

The burden of rural women in developing countries is well known. The United Nations, in Geneva in 1992, convened the first international conference on rural women and development. We should be able to say of our development efforts that not only is development necessary for rural women, but what is good for rural women is good for development.

This perception has grown and become widely understood. Women - their lives, their roles, their aspirations - are the key to development in every dimension. Equality, peace and development must reach every woman on Earth. When the rights and hopes of women in all these fields are advanced, so will all human society come to benefit.

This Conference is a milestone in the history of United Nations work for women. It is the culmination of a chain of global conferences. It embraces the issues covered by all of them. This Conference is a call to action.

The Platform is comprehensive and challenging. It takes an integrated approach to a wide range of issues. It cuts across all of the concerns - economic, social, cultural and political - of the United Nations system.

As we go forward, the partnership between government and civil society will be crucial. But the Platform will not become reality unless that partnership now extends into the implementation stage.

Neither government decrees nor the isolated acts of small groups of citizens will be enough to make the Platform work. Both must work hand in hand. The partnership must be mobilized at all levels; the family, the local community and the State.

Government can garner resources. Civil society can reach down to engage all members of society. The movement's theme - "think globally, act locally" - is more relevant than ever.

There is a growing awareness that attitudes as well as behaviour - both of individuals and of institutions - must change to take account of the real rights and real needs of women.

Let us not forget that the progress we make is measurable, and it will be measured. Future generations will hold us accountable. They will look for concrete signs that Beijing, in 1995, was followed by real action. Let us not disappoint them. Let us not disappoint ourselves. Together we must follow our words with our deeds. We must take up the cause of the world's women.

Statement by Chen Muhua, Vice-Chairperson of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China and President of the Conference

First of all, please allow me to express my gratitude for your trust in electing me President of the Fourth World Conference on Women. While extremely honoured, I am fully aware of the tremendous responsibility associated with the post. To live up to your trust, I will do my utmost to cooperate with delegates from all countries and the United Nations Secretariat to make the Conference a complete success. In the meantime, I am looking forward to your support and guidance.

In 1985, as head of the delegation of China, I attended the third World Conference on Women, in Nairobi, where I joined delegates from other countries in discussing ways to advance the status of women and, together, we produced a very important document - the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. For me, the experience was most exciting.

Today, 10 years later, on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations and with the approach of a new century, we are gathered here in Beijing to draft the Beijing Declaration and Programme of Action, aimed at accelerating the implementation of the Nairobi Strategies with a view to realizing our common objective of gender equality.

Enormous changes have taken place over the past 10 years in the world in which we live. While peace and development remain the two common tasks facing the whole world, the advancement of the status of women has become a key objective. While peace, stability and economic development underlie the advancement of the status of women, equal status and participation of women are an important guarantee for maintaining peace and achieving development. Therefore, when planning our strategy for the future, we must bear in mind the theme of the Conference and also our common goal: Action for Equality, Development and Peace.

It is reassuring that thanks to the joint efforts of the United Nations, national Governments and non-governmental organizations, gratifying progress has been made in promoting gender equality and women are playing an increasingly important role in various fields of social life. The important role of women and their rights have been reaffirmed and stressed in recent years at such major international meetings as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the World Conference on Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development and the World Summit for Social Development. It

is evident that women are crying out for an improvement in their status; the times demand it; humanity aspires to it.

Although progress has been made, we must not lose sight of the stark reality facing us: the various objectives set forth in the Nairobi Strategies have not yet been realized; the number of women in poverty is increasing worldwide and a large number of women and children are still fighting a losing battle against hunger; the illiteracy rate of women remains far higher than that of men as large numbers of girls are forced to drop out of school for various reasons; many women, having no access to basic health care, remain vulnerable to the threat of diseases; in some regions, women and children have become the largest group of victims of constant armed conflicts; violence against women, including domestic violence, still exists. More often than not, women's rights, instead of being respected, are violated and trampled on. All these are serious obstacles to the advancement of the status of women worldwide.

Our mission at this Conference is both noble and arduous. I hope that all participants will seek common ground while putting aside differences, unite as one and cooperate closely to turn the theme of this Conference - Action for Equality, Development and Peace - into reality.

In five years, we will enter the twenty-first century. Everyone present at the Conference, including myself, shoulders an important historic task. Women from all countries and regions of the world are watching us earnestly, hoping that the international community and national Governments will make a solemn commitment and translate it into concrete actions so that this Conference will help accelerate the improvement of the status of women the world over. Let us work together to live up to the ardent expectations of the entire world.

Statement by Gertrude Mongella, Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women

At long long last, we are here in Beijing participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women - a conference that is phenomenal in several respects. It has generated much interest and debate globally, among men and women, old and young, from country to country. It has brought together the largest gathering of persons ever to attend any other United Nations conference on any subject. All the indications point to a social revolution in the making!

This Conference has been characterized by an intensive preparatory process involving national, regional and international debates and consultations among Governments and non-governmental bodies. At every stage, a step towards consensus-building has been taken. We are now faced with a final test of our commitment for action - our Platform for Action.

This Platform is a global tapestry woven by women, men and youth with strands from all nations, races and religions alike. It has been carefully, objectively and caringly embroidered through the various consultations, conferences and meetings organized at the national, regional and international levels. The Platform is a document for the world; but for women, it is their document since it embodies the aspirations, hopes and actions that will guide us all into the twenty-first century. In fact, the Platform is for everyone. There can be no spectators, no side-liners, no abstainers, for this is the crucial social agenda that affects all humanity.

It is for this reason that I wish to appeal to each woman participating in this Conference and in the NGO Forum not only to serve as representatives of their Governments and non-governmental organizations, but also to become committed crusaders in the struggle in which we have been engaged for many, many years. As I noted at the opening of the NGO Forum, "Millions have placed their trust in us. We must not fail them."

I would like to highlight a few salient features that became obvious during the preparatory process for the Beijing Conference:

First, there is the need to look at women's issues in a holistic manner and to address them as part of overall societal and developmental concerns. It will not be possible to attain sustainable development without cementing the partnership of women and men in all aspects of life. Women have always struggled with their men-folk for the abolition of slavery, the liberation of countries from colonialism, the dismantling of apartheid and the attainment of peace. It is now the turn of men to join women in their struggle for equality.

Second, because of the cross-cutting nature of women's issues, it is imperative that each issue be given due weight and consideration.

Third, there is the need to recognize the intergenerational link that is unique to women, as well as the cumulative effect, since unresolved problems tend to deteriorate in subsequent phases.

Finally, since the first women's conference in Mexico some 20 years ago, women have learnt that to achieve equality they must depend on themselves. The necessary actions will not be taken for them based on some theoretical principle of equality. Women have researched and they have been the subject of research. The statistics are much too gloomy in a number of key areas, such as poverty, education and illiteracy, health, violence against women, governance and politics, and human rights. With the statistics and facts now well documented, there is no denying that women fare badly relative to men. The World's Women 1995, published only last month, further shows irrefutably both the changes that have occurred and the remaining obstacles.

We are in the crucial last decade of the twentieth century and the solidarity that today binds us in our common experiences, irrespective of race, colour and religion, should now become the instrument to propel us all into the twenty-first century armed with the vision, imagination and actions that can make the difference in our own lives and those of our children and grandchildren. We have been saying all along that women and men must work together if we are to bring this world safely and successfully into the coming century. So too, must we ensure the participation of young people. They are our hope and future, and society can only be the beneficiary.

Our agenda must address the eradication of illiteracy, ill-health, poverty, unemployment and violence, and the promotion of decision-making and empowerment. It must focus on actions that will eliminate discrimination, marginalization and social exclusion.

The basis for change is here; what is lacking is the commitment that will ensure the actions that could bring about that change. When the facts and statistics are disaggregated, the undeniable fact is that action is required to change the status quo. Action is the only way forward. There is no substitute.

The Fourth World Conference on Women must elicit commitments to actic coupled with commitments of resources, national and international. This is the mission of the Beijing Conference. Each Government must now set priorities, specify the resources it will contribute and declare what steps it will take to hold itself accountable to the world's women. This Conference must preserve achievements and agreements reached in earlier conferences and move beyond rhetoric to work towards genuine change.

I must conclude now by posing the following questions on an issue that is close to my heart and to the hearts of many other women:

- How long will women toil to contribute to the purchase of arms?
- How long will women continue to give life just to see it taken away by force of arms?
- And how long will the world continue to ignore women's tears during armed conflicts?

This Platform will not see light as long as the issue of peace is not properly addressed.

Statement by Benazir Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan

Pakistan is grateful to the Government and the people of China for hosting this Conference. We have been deeply touched by the warm welcome and gracious hospitality.

I pay a special tribute to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and Mrs. Gertrude Mongella, the Secretary-General of the Conference for their tireless efforts in organizing this meeting.

There is a moral crisis engulfing the world as we speak, a crisis of injustice and inaction, a crisis of silence and acquiescence.

The crisis is caused by centuries and generations of oppression and repression.

This Conference, therefore, transcends politics and economics. We are dealing with a fundamental moral issue.

This is a truly historic occasion. Some 40,000 women have assembled here to demand their rights; to secure a better future for their daughters; to put an end to the prejudices which still deny so many of us our rightful place in society.

On this solemn occasion I stand before you not only as a Prime Minister but as a woman and a mother - a woman proud of her cultural and religious heritage, a woman sensitive to the obstacles to justice and full participation that still stand before women in almost every society on earth.

As the first woman ever elected to head an Islamic nation, I feel a special responsibility towards women's issues and towards all women.

And as a Muslim woman, I feel a special responsibility to counter the propaganda of a handful of people that Islam gives women second class status.

This is not true. Today the Muslim world boasts three Prime Ministers who are women, elected by male and female voters on our abilities as people, as persons, not as women.

Our election has destroyed the myth built by social taboo that a woman's place is in the home, that it is shameful or dishonourable or socially unacceptable for a Muslim woman to work.

Our election has given women all over the Muslim world moral strength to declare that it is socially correct for a woman to work and to follow in our footsteps as working women and working mothers.

Muslim women have a special responsibility to help distinguish between Islamic teachings and social taboos spun by the traditions of a patriarchal society.

This is a distinction that obscurantists would not like to see. For obscurantists believe in discrimination. Discrimination is the first step to dictatorship and the usurpation of power.

A month ago, Pakistan hosted the first ever conference of Women Parliamentarians of the Muslim World. Never in the history of Islam have so may working women and elected representatives gathered together at one place to speak with one voice.

As over a 100 delegates from 35 Muslim countries gathered together, I felt an enormous sense of pride that we women had each other for strength and support, across the globe and across the continents to face and oppose those who would not allow the empowerment of women.

Today, I feel that same sense of pride - we women have gathered together at Beijing, at this ancient capital of an ancient civilization to decare that we are not alone in our search for empowerment, that women across continents are together in the search for self-esteem, self-worth, self-respect and respect in society itself. In distinguishing between Islamic teachings and social taboos, we must remember that Islam forbids injustice: injustice against people, against nations, against women. It shuns race, colour and gender as a basis of distinction among fellowmen. It enshrines piety as the sole criteria for judging humankind. It treats women as human beings in their own right, not as chattels. A woman can inherit, divorce, receive alimony and have custody of children. Women are intellectuals, poets, jurists and even take part in war.

The Holy Book of the Muslims refers to the rule of a woman, the Queen of Sabah. The Holy Book alludes to her wisdom and to her country being a land of plenty.

The Holy Prophet himself married a working woman. And the first convert to Islam was a woman, Bibi Khadija.

Prophet Muhammad emphatically condemned and put an end to the practice of female infanticide in pre-Islamic Arabia. The Koran reads:

When news is brought to one of them, of the birth of a female (child),
his face darkens and he is filled with inward grief
what shame does he hide himself from his people
because of the bad news he has had.
Shall he retain it on sufferance and contempt,
or bury it in the dust.
Ah! what an evil choice they decide on (Surah Al-Nahl, Ayat-57, 58, 59)

How true these words ring even today. How many women are still "retained" in their families "on sufferance and contempt" growing up with emotional scars and burdens. How tragic it is that the pre-Islamic practice of female infanticide still haunts a world we regard as modern and civilized. Girl children are often abandoned or aborted.

Statistics show that men now increasingly outnumber women in more than 15 Asian nations. Boys are wanted. Boys are wanted because their worth is considered more than that of girls. Boys are wanted to satisfy the ego: they carry on the father's name in this world.

Yet too often we forget that for Muslims on the Day of Judgement, each person will be called not by their father's name but by the mother's name.

To please her husband, a woman wants a son. To keep her husband from abandoning her, a woman wants a son. And, too often, when a woman expects a girl, she abets her husband in abandoning or aborting that innocent, perfectly formed child.

As we gather here today, the cries of the girl child reach out to us.

This Conference needs to chart a course that can create a climate where a girl child is as welcomed and valued as a boy child and where a girl child is considered as worthy as a boy child.

When I was Chairperson of the South Asian Association of Regional Countries, the Association declared 1989 the Year of the Girl Child. Six years later, the girl child's vulnerability continues. It continues, not because of religion in the case of Pakistan, but because of social prejudice.

The rights Islam gave Muslim women have too often been denied. And women are denied rights all over the world, whether developed or developing. All over the world women are subjected to domestic violence. Often a woman does not walk out for she has nowhere to go. Or she stays and puts up with the domestic violence for the sake of their children.

We in Pakistan have started a public awareness campaign against domestic violence through the mass media to inform women that domestic violence is a crime and to alert men that they can be punished for it.

In many a society, women are often tortured, not only by men, but by female in-laws too, for financial benefits from the woman's family.

Sometimes a wife is killed by her husband or in-laws so that he can gain another wife and more dowry. The dowry system is a social ill against which we must raise our voices and create greater awareness.

Women are not only victims of physical abuse, women are victims of verbal abuse.

Often men, in anger and frustration, indulge in the uncivilized use of rude and vulgar language against women. Unfortunately, women at times also use vulgar language to denigrate another woman.

So we have to work together to change not only the attitudes of men but the attitudes of men and women.

Women have become the victims of a culture of exclusion and male dominance. Today more women than men suffer poverty, deprivation and discrimination. Half a billion women are illiterate. Seventy per cent of the children who are denied elementary education are girls. In Pakistan, we are concentrating on primary education for girls to rectify this imbalance. We are concentrating on training women teachers and opening up employment avenues for women.

It is my firm conviction that a woman cannot ultimately control her own life and make her own choices unless she has financial independence. A woman cannot have financial independence if she cannot work.

Discrimination against women can begin to erode only when women are educated and women are employed.

If my father had not educated me or left me with independent financial means, I would not have been able to sustain myself or to struggle against tyranny or to stand here before you today as a special guest speaker.

If the girl child is to be valued, if the wife is to say "No" to domestic violence, then we owe a special obligation to creating jobs for women.

That is why we in Pakistan set up the Women's Bank in 1989. The Bank is run by women for women - to aid and assist them in setting up their own enterprises so as to gain financial independence and with it the freedom to make their own choices. Today 23 branches of the Women's Bank in Pakistan help working women.

Our major cities are marked by enterprises set up by women: bakeries, restaurants, boutiques, interior decoration. We have lifted the ban on Pakistani women taking part in international sporting events. In 1997, we host the Second Muslim Women's Olympics. Special sporting facilities are being set up to encourage participation by Pakistani women in sports.

And Pakistani women are playing a significant role in defusing the population bomb in Pakistan. One hundred thousand women are to be trained to reduce Pakistan's population growth levels and its infant mortality levels. When I visit poverty-stricken villages with no access to clean drinking water, it gladdens my heart to see a lady health visitor, to see a working woman amidst the unfortunate surroundings. For it is my conviction that we can conquer poverty, squalor, illiteracy and superstition only when we invest in our women and when our women begin working - begin working in our far-flung villages where time seems to have stood still and where the bullock not the tractor is still used for cultivation; where women are weak from bearing too many children; where the daughters are more malnourished than the sons, for the daughters get to eat the leftovers; where villagers work night and day with their women and children, to eke out an existence; where floods and rain wash out crops and destroy homes; where poverty stalks the land with an appetite that cannot be controlled until we wake up to the twin reality of population control and women's empowerment. And it is here that the United Nations and its Secretary-General have played a critical role.

Some cynics argue about the utility of holding this Conference. Let me disagree with them. The holding of this Conference demonstrates that women are not forgotten, that the world cares. The holding of this Conference demonstrates solidarity with women. The holding of this Conference makes us determined to contribute each in our own way, in any manner we can, to lessen the oppression, repression and discrimination against women. While much needs to be done, each decade has brought with it its own small improvement.

When I was growing up, women in my extended family remained behind closed walls in village homes. Now we all travel to cities or abroad.

When I was growing up, women in my extended family covered themselves with the burqa, or veil, from head to foot when they visited each other for weddings or funerals - the only two events for which we were allowed out. Now most women restrict themselves to the duppatta or chadar and are free to leave the house.

When I was growing up, no girl in my extended family was allowed to marry if a boy cousin was not available, for fear of the property leaving the family. Now girls do marry outside the family.

When I was growing up, the boy cousin inevitably took a second wife. Now girls do not expect their husbands to marry again. From being the norm, it has become the exception to the norm.

When I was growing up, women were not educated. I was the first girl in my family to go to university and to go abroad for my studies. Now it has become the norm for girls to be educated at university and abroad when the families can afford it.

I have seen a lot of changes in my lifetime. But I hope to see many more changes. Some of these changes I hope will flow from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which calls for the elimination of discrimination against women.

I hope some of these changes will flow from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which Pakistan signed last month. Of course there was resistance from many quarters. But we are determined to move forward in fulfilling our dream of a Pakistan where women contribute their full potential.

As women, we draw satisfaction from the Beijing Platform for Action, which takes a comprehensive approach towards the empowerment of women.

But women cannot be expected to struggle alone against the forces of discrimination and exploitation. I recall the words of Dante, who reminded us that:

> "The hottest place in Hell is reserved for those who remain neutral in times of moral crisis."

Today in this world, in the fight for the liberation of women, there can be no neutrality. But we have learned that democracy alone is not enough. Freedom of choice alone does not guarantee justice. Equal rights are not defined only by political values. Social justice is a triad of freedom, of equality, of liberty:

Justice is political liberty.
Justice is economic independence.
Justice is social equality.

Empowerment is not only the right to have political freedom. Empowerment is the right to be independent; to be educated; to have choices in life. Empowerment is the right to have the opportunity to select a productive career; to own property; to participate in business; to flourish in the market place.

Pakistan is satisfied that the draft Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women negotiated so far focuses on the critical areas of concern for women and outlines an action-oriented strategy for the solution of their problems. However, we believe that the Platform needs to address the questions of new and additional resources, external debt, structural adjustment programmes, human rights of women, protection of women entrapped in armed conflicts and the realization of the right to self-determination of the territories still under foreign occupation and alien domination.

It must also seek to strengthen the role of the traditional family as the bedrock of society. Disintegration of the family generates moral decay. This must be arrested. The Platform is disturbingly weak on the role of the traditional family. This weakness can lead to misinterpretation, and even distortion, by opponents of the women's agenda.

We have seen much progress. The very fact that we convene in Beijing today is a giant step forward. But new clouds darken the horizon.

The end of the cold war should have ushered in peace and an era of progress for women. Regrettably, the proliferation of regional tensions and conflicts have belied our aspirations. As in the past, women and girls have again been the most direct victims of these conflicts - the most helpless, and thus the most abused.

The use of rape as a weapon of war and an instrument of "ethnic cleansing" is as depraved as it is reprehensible. The unfolding of this saga in different parts of the world, including Jammu and Kashmir and Bosnia and Herzegovina has shaken the conscience of the entire international community.

The enormity of the tragedy dwarfs our other issues - urgent though they are. This Conference must therefore express its complete solidarity with our sisters and daughters who are victims of armed conflict, oppression and brutality. Their misfortunes must be our first priority.

I come before you to speak of the forces that must shape the new decade, the new century, the new millennium.

We must shape a world free from exploitation and maltreatment of women, a world in which women have opportunities to rise to the highest level in politics, business, diplomacy and other spheres of life; where there are no battered women; where honour and dignity are protected in war and conflict; where we have economic freedom and independence; where we are equal partners in peace and development; a world committed to economic development and political development equally; a world as committed to free markets as it is to women's emancipation.

Even as we catalogue, organize and reach our goals, step by step by step, let us be ever vigilant. Repressive forces will always stand ready to exploit the moment and push us back into the past.

Let us remember the words of the German writer, Goethe:

"Freedom has to be re-made and re-earned in every generation."

We must do much more than decry the past. We must change the future.

Remembering the words of a sister parliamentarian, Senator Barbara Mikulski, that "demography is destiny", I believe time, justice and the forces of history are on our side. We are here in Beijing to proclaim a new vision of equality and partnership. Let us translate this vision into reality in the shortest possible time.

Statement by Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, President of Iceland

I am honoured and indeed deeply grateful to have the opportunity to address this singularly important Conference. History, I suspect, will judge this Conference as important in many ways, and not least for simply taking place. Irrespective of how concrete or immediate its effect proves to be, it is some encouragement to us to know that the work being done here would have been dismissed as unthinkable only a few years ago, but will eventually seem in retrospect a natural step towards the progress of civilization.

The Fourth World Conference on Women is taking place in a jubilee year, as we commemorate the founding of the United Nations 50 years ago. In our venue here it is perhaps appropriate to recall that the ancient Chinese used the phrase "May you live in interesting times" not to wish people well, but as a curse. At the same time, as we celebrate this anniversary our sense of triumph at what the global community has achieved in unison is strangely muted. We cannot ignore the tragic human conflicts that still rage on in various parts of the world.

Obviously, the march of history does not yield itself to the whims of the almanac. Nevertheless, the timing of our Conference inevitably merges its theme with the wider question of the kind of vision we want to set out for the United Nations in the next half century.

It is certainly a mark of how far we have come in the past 20 years that the pairing together of women's advancement and issues of human survival is no longer questioned. Instead, it is accepted as legitimate and timely and even necessary.

Needless to say, it was not always so. In the earliest work of Western political thought, Plato's Republic, Socrates attempts to sketch the best political order according to nature. But he is interrupted by his friends who blame him for omitting the role of women. It turns out that Socrates has been reluctant at first to admit women as equal partners in his scheme of things, for fear of earning himself the ridicule of his fellow men. He then reminds himself that the chores that will be expected of women under the new scheme were at one time shocking and ridiculous for men as well. But then, in his words, "the appearance of absurdity ebbed away under the influence of reason's judgement about the best".

This is of course the viewpoint of a male in a male-dominated society, praiseworthy as its acknowledgement of notional female equality may be. But for women today, the opposite is closer to the truth: the idea of not being able to enjoy equality strikes us as absurd, as well as irrational. I happen to know that very many men agree with us too.

Unlike Socrates, perhaps, today's architects of a better future will hardly need to be reminded to take due account of women, if only because many of them are women anyway, and their number is steadily increasing. Today, most States in the world are legally committed to protecting and promoting women's human rights. And beyond the possibilities offered by legal frameworks, the need to secure women's full and equal participation in all spheres of private and public life is increasingly recognized.

Women's rights have ceased to be a peripheral "progressive" cause and have instead acquired a universality, not least through efforts made at a global level by organizations such as the United Nations.

At a time when the United Nations is frequently faulted for not being equipped to deal with pressing challenges, we do well to recall the pivotal role of our world Organization and its agencies in spearheading efforts to secure equal access for women in all aspects of political, economic and social development. With due regard also to the contribution made by numerous non-governmental organizations, I would therefore like to take this opportunity to pay special tribute to the United Nations for its leadership in this field.

But we must not bathe ourselves in the glory of self-congratulation. We need the courage to qualify all that we have accomplished with a frank admission of our most glaring deficiencies. Paradoxically, the number of women living in poverty has increased disproportionately to men; now, women constitute the majority of the world's poor. This is reflected at all levels: health, education and physical security, as well as political and economic power and influence. Girls and women frequently do not enjoy the same access to nourishment and medical attention as men. Two thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women and so are most of the world's refugees and victims of violence. Moreover, there are many countries where women, if included at all, are deliberately kept on the margins of public life.

It will be the task of this Conference to tackle those shortcomings: not just admit to them, but try to explain where they originate and how they can be eliminated. In the coming days the Conference will review the critical areas of concern to women and, hopefully, adopt a Platform for Action containing concrete proposals. But we must not rest satisfied with words alone. Needless to say, much depends on the political will of Governments to ensure their proper implementation. New resources may be required in order to do so, but they are not a prerequisite, and their lack must not be used as an excuse for failing to act at all. It is well within the means of many national Governments to prevent some of the adversities which particularly affect women. Indeed, it is their responsibility to do so.

Together, we now have a unique opportunity, because, in a sense, we are revisiting the Charter of the United Nations.

Mistakenly or not, the birth of the United Nations was seen by many people as the fulfilment of an ageless quest for lasting peace. The foremost goal of the Charter was to eliminate war. But underlying the Charter was a no less ambitious ideal: the commitment to address the sources of human conflict

through the promotion of human rights, justice and social progress. It was certainly not the fault of the United Nations that international political manoeuvring overshadowed this second ideal. The onset of the cold war and the outbreak of East-West rivalry induced the leading Powers of the world to try to impose durable peace by the paradoxical means of establishing military superiority over each other. In a word, the United Nations was never given the chance to work as intended. The experiment was never completed.

In recent years we have witnessed the United Nations adapt itself quickly to the new demands of the post-cold-war environment. The series of conferences, starting with the World Summit for Children in New York and continuing with the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, have set a new agenda whereby the Organization has broken free from the narrow conception of security as something largely measured in military terms. Instead, we are charting a new path to peace, based on the recognition that the security of individuals is in the long run not to be separated from the security of States.

It is in this sense that we are revisiting the Charter of the United Nations. In so doing we are rediscovering the neglected relationship, embedded in the Charter, between the maintenance of peace and the equal rights of men and women. The drafters of the Charter did not add "equal rights of men and women" as an afterthought. They enshrined it up front in the second paragraph of the Preamble to the Charter. And as we carry the torch for women to Beijing now and the "City Summit" in Istanbul next year, we are also demonstrating to the world that urgent global concerns including the environment, population growth and social development, involve women just as much as men.

All rights are matched by obligations, and in demanding equal rights to control their lives, women are also declaring their willingness to undertake the obligation of tackling these global concerns, in league with men, for the benefit of everyone on the planet. If we can state the cause of equality in such terms, we have truly universalized it and begun to look far into the future towards a very different quality of society. But curiously enough, such a vision strikes me as far less unthinkable than the notion of women's equality would have seemed a hundred years ago. In this sense we can justifiably say that we have come a very long way indeed.

We have come to Beijing to advance the cause of women. But even more important, we have come here as responsible citizens of the human race committed to creating a better world for succeeding generations. In the Chinese language, there is a sign for peace showing a man and a woman under one roof. As I conclude this address by thanking the Government of China for its generosity in providing the venue for such a large conference of men and women from all over the world, I should like to express the sincere wish that, before we depart from under this roof, we may come to make a relevant, substantial and lasting contribution to world peace.

Statement by Khaleda Zia, Prime Minister of Bangladesh

We have gathered here in Beijing for a common purpose - to renew our commitment to the advancement of women. As I stand here in this seat of ancient civilization, I feel inspired by a sense of optimism that the age-old prejudices against women are finally giving way and we are drawing closer to our cherished goal of equality, development and peace.

I have no doubt that this World Conference in Beijing will be a landmark in the history of women's struggle towards equality and freedom that began with the first world conference on women 20 years ago in Mexico. I feel privileged to be present here at this historic moment to express Bangladesh's solidarity with you. I would like to express our deep appreciation to the Government of China for its warm welcome, hospitality and excellent arrangements for this Conference. I congratulate you, Madam President on your election and feel confident that under your able guidance, this Conference will proceed smoothly and complete its heavy agenda.

The journey from Mexico to Beijing has been a long one. It was an odyssey that lasted two decades. It was a movement that was marked by a sense of deep commitment and perseverance. But the obstacles and barriers that stood in the way were formidable - the foremost being the psychological barriers. But the sense of determination of women the world over was unshakable.

A series of conferences sharpened the global focus on our concerns. There was progress, though in varying degrees, in every country of the world. The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies were the beacon that guided our paths. Gender gaps in education and health narrowed. Female life expectancy increased appreciably. Maternal mortality rates were halved. Differences in literacy between the sexes diminished vastly.

This record of progress, however, cannot hide the fact that women still live in an unequal world. While educational and health care opportunities have increased rapidly for women, the doors to economic and political opportunities are not yet fully open to them in many parts of the world. This is clearly evident from the fact that 70 per cent of the poor are still women. They are disadvantaged in matters of employment, wages, access to credit and representation in administrative and political levels.

Violence and discrimination against women in many societies also remain high. The barbaric atrocities being committed against women in Bosnia are a painful reminder that even in Europe today the veneer of civilization and enlightenment is thin indeed.

The previous three women's conferences succeeded in raising the international community's awareness about these issues. They were instrumental in persuading Governments to accelerate their investment in the education and health of their women and in upholding women's rights. The main challenge for the Beijing Conference is to widen the economic and political opportunities that have remained constricted until now. In Beijing our political will to advance the cause of women must find true and meaningful expression.

In this context, this Conference must reiterate three factors that are crucial to the advancement of women:

First, that improving the condition of women is a vital investment in the future of humankind. The spin-offs are many. Women are a fundamental force in eradicating poverty, charting a sustainable future and attaining regional and global peace.

Second, we must affirm the need for a new relationship and harmonious partnership between men and women, Governments and citizens, indeed all those who can contribute solutions to complex social problems. Democracy has fostered a larger civil society and value system. I believe this must be buttressed by a responsible society in which the supportive role of government is indispensable.

Finally, we must do everything possible to create, promote and sustain awareness of the role and contribution of women by all means possible.

Perhaps it would be appropriate for me to share my country's experience with you. It is well known that in Bangladesh our constraints are numerous and diverse. Yet our commitment remains unflinching. We have made every effort in the last few years to enhance the status of women. We have sought to empower them to enable them to contribute their best to societal progress. We have several significant achievements to our credit. Let me enumerate some of these.

Our Constitution guarantees gender equality in all spheres of national life. Laws are in place to protect the rights of women. We have set up an independent Ministry of Women's Affairs. Government policies are directed towards the mainstreaming of women in our socio-economic development programmes. A national Council for Women's Development under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister has been formed to provide policy guidelines and to oversee the activities of all the ministries in this area.

As is apparent, women in our society have begun to play a key role in politics. They freely participate in national and local elections. To ensure minimal involvement in legislative matters, 10 per cent of all parliamentary seats are also reserved for women. There are specific quotas for them at all levels of government services.

Education for girl students is highly encouraged. Our Government has launched innovative schemes to increase their enrolment in schools. The Food for Education programme is one such novel idea that has paid dividends. Another programme is providing stipends for girl students up to grade 10. Today, in many parts of our country girl students outnumber boys.

Impartial observers have lauded our progress in the health sector as well. Health care services are now far more readily available. The life expectancy of women has increased from 54 years in 1985 to 57 years in 1994. Infant mortality rates have been reduced. Women have gained from the decrease in population growth from 2.35 per cent in 1985 to 1.9 per cent in 1994.

One of the most significant transformations that is taking place in Bangladesh today has been the substantial increase in female employment in both urban and rural areas. Close to a million women are employed today in the production of ready-made garments alone. Our policy of providing credit without collateral is paying rich dividends. It is estimated that there are well over 6 million self-employed women engaged mainly in small-scale productive ventures and related activities in rural areas.

While the Government itself has made efforts in devising a large number of innovative programmes for the empowerment, emancipation and employment of women, I would also like to stress that the Government's efforts have been supplemented by private and non-governmental initiatives. The achievements of many of them especially the Grameen Bank have been remarkable.

The seven countries of South Asia that have come together under the umbrella of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have given the highest priority to women. In this connection, I would refer to the SAARC declaration of 1991-2000 as the Decade for the Girl Child and the SAARC target for the elimination of absolute poverty, preferably by the year 2002. Our efforts have certainly been given an added meaning and significance by

virtue of the fact that three out of seven SAARC countries today are headed by women who have been placed at the helm of affairs through the ballot box.

In Bangladesh we are also poised to undertake appropriate strategic measures and massive programmes for the empowerment of women during the Fifteen-Year Perspective Plan beginning from this year.

Bangladesh has thus held steadfastly to the goals and objectives of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies. Our achievements may not have been very spectacular but they are clearly indicative of our determination to realize those goals.

Last December, a common position paper of the SAARC countries containing five important recommendations was forwarded to the Conference secretariat.

More recently, in July the SAARC Ministerial Meeting on Women was held in Dhaka. The Dhaka resolution adopted at that Meeting stressed the following:

- Eradication of poverty among women;
- Survival, protection and development of the girl child;
- Measures to counter violence against women, including trafficking in women and children;
- Equal access to educational opportunities for women;
- Equal access to health-care services and nutrition for women.

I believe that this very significant work done under the framework of SAARC has a much wider relevance. We hope that these recommendations will be reflected in the Platform for Action to be adopted in Beijing.

Similarly, we should draw upon the results of other such regional and international meetings held in the recent past. We can profit enormously from their outcome.

The Platform for Action should uphold the religious, cultural and social values that are instrumental in strengthening family ties, social peace and stability. I would take this opportunity to mention here that the teachings and tenets of Islam can contribute positively to the realization of our common goal of equality, development and peace.

Our vision for the future world is not for a world that is ideal, but for one that is just; not for one that is unattainable, but for one that is achievable. This vision will be transformed into reality not by mere commitment but by matching action. The initiatives taken here in Beijing can be rendered far more meaningful by complementary action elsewhere. There must be a free flow of resources to achieve our goals. There must be commensurate new and additional resources in the form of finance, technical know-how and technology transfer from the developed to the developing world.

There must be a more vigorous application of development policies by the United Nations system and other international forums. There must also be special attention paid to the plight of the women of the least developed countries. The structural nature of their constraints make their problems more acute. The global community must be called upon to augment national efforts by

international action. This is an opportunity to display the universality of human fraternity. Let the world seize upon it.

The Platform for Action adopted in Beijing will, no doubt, have a far-reaching impact on the lives of women for decades to come. However, I believe that what will be of crucial significance is to ensure that there is a good, effective, visible and credible follow-up mechanism in position. In Copenhagen at the World Summit for Social Development, I had put forward three specific proposals. One of these proposals related to calling upon the Secretary-General to make the entire United Nations system more responsive to this new agenda for international cooperation, which we established through a series of landmark conferences in Rio de Janeiro, Cairo, Copenhagen and now here in Beijing.

In the case of the follow-up action to the World Conference in Beijing, I would like to submit the following three proposals:

First, at the United Nations General Assembly this year priority should be given to the creation of a new post of Deputy Secretary-General in charge of women's affairs. Needless to say, this post must be occupied by a woman of proven ability who would be given responsibility for coordination of all women's activities and women's programmes throughout the United Nations system. She would also have specific responsibility for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Second, a high-level United Nations commission made up entirely of women of great eminence should be established. The members of this commission would serve in their personal capacity. They could be drawn from different walks of life. The commission would put forward specific proposals and suggest programmes to facilitate the implementation of the Platform for Action. Above all, it would monitor and evaluate the performance of all United Nations bodies and agencies on issues relating to women. The several eminent and distinguished women who are holding top positions in the United Nations system may also be invited to serve in their individual capacity on the commission.

Third, I would like to suggest that the Secretary-General of the United Nations take the lead in instituting an annual award to be given to a woman whose achievements during the year would earn her the title of Woman of the Year. The person should be selected by an international jury of great eminence. Perhaps the Secretary-General could invite the distinguished President of this Conference to serve as the first chairperson of the international jury.

My three proposals relate primarily to the international community and specifically to women of great eminence who have a global vision. While considering these proposals, we must not forget the millions of women in our own countries who struggle day and night to improve the quality of their lives and contribute in their own modest way to female emancipation, enlightenment and empowerment. National awards can be instituted for these women who have contributed in their own modest way to uplifting women in their respective countries. In so doing, we shall endeavour to remember the significance of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. In so doing, we shall pay tribute to the sacrifice and contribution made by countless generations of women. In so doing, we hope we shall also inspire our youth and future generations of girls to look ahead with a sense of confidence in their true worth, dignity and capabilities.

I came to Beijing with a sense of great hope and expectation. I shall not leave disappointed. On the contrary, my sense of determination to continue to

work for the women of Bangladesh, for their betterment, for their happiness and well-being has been fortified and strengthened. True, the task is enormous, but I know that today the world stands behind us. We shall support, sustain and encourage each other in facing the challenges ahead. We must succeed and indeed we will.

Statement by Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe, Vice-President and Minister of Gender and Community Development of Uganda

It gives me great honour as leader of the delegation of Uganda to be among the first speakers to address the eagerly awaited Fourth World Conference on Women, a Conference poised to prepare humankind for the challenges of the twenty-first century for a better world.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, Madam President, and all the members of the Bureau upon election to guide this memorable Conference and I trust that your great wisdom and experience will guide us towards a fruitful conclusion of all the important agenda items before us.

On the same note, I would like to extend my delegation's sincere appreciation to the Government of China for all the preparations put into hosting this Conference and the hospitality extended to us since our arrival in this beautiful country.

The secretariat of the Conference has had an immense task in the preparatory process and in putting together the draft Platform for Action. I congratulate my sister, the Secretary-General of the Conference Mrs. Gertrude Mongella, and her team for all the work put into coordinating and guiding this process.

My delegation appreciates the ongoing trends and initiatives in the United Nations system directed towards more practical and systematic action for the advancement of women, and the momentum that has been maintained through the convening of a series of global events where women's concerns and indeed developmental issues have been discussed.

We note in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which Uganda signed without reservations, and which provides appropriate guidelines for Member States in addressing critical issues that affect the status of women. It is my earnest hope that the momentum gained and enthusiasm generated during the past two decades will continue until such time as equality, development and peace are achieved in reality.

Profound global changes in political, economic, social and cultural relationships have dominated the 1990s and have provided us with new challenges. The rights and responsibilities of individuals and States on a range of global issues have been defined and redefined in various conferences and conventions. The women's movement world wide has played and continues to play an increasingly influential role in focusing debates and taking action for the empowerment of women. In all the debates, the message is clear: nothing short of aggressively redressing the gender imbalance will attain sustainable people-centred development.

This has called for concerted efforts at national, regional and international levels to put into action the goals and strategies laid down in

the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, which set the agenda for advancing the status of women in 1985.

After almost a decade of consolidating its fragile peace, Uganda is now embarking on a process of democratization and is committed to protecting human rights and women's rights in particular.

Uganda's position on the role of women is clear and positive. In recognition of the disadvantaged position that women have held for a long time, the Government has pursued a policy of affirmative action and as a result, Uganda has a record of six women ministers, including myself, the Vice-President, and five women judges of the High Court. In addition, women constitute 16 per cent of members of Parliament and 19 per cent of members of the constituent assembly, a body that has written a new Constitution for our country.

We have guaranteed the presence of a minimum representation of 30 per cent of either sex on all local government councils. The presence of women is crucial if they are to be effective watchdogs for their rights.

To reinforce this further, the Constitution has provided for an equal opportunities commission to monitor and supervise the implementation of laws made to effect affirmative action in favour of women and such other marginalized groups as youth and persons with disabilities.

In the new Constitution, the following provisions, which protect women's fundamental human rights and dignity of person, have been embedded:

- Women shall be accorded the same personal dignity as men;
- Women shall have the right to equal treatment with men and that right shall include equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities;
- Women shall have the right to affirmative action for the purpose of redressing the imbalance created by history and traditional customs;
- Laws, cultures and customs or traditions that are against the dignity, welfare or interest of women or that undermine their status are prohibited by this Constitution.

In the area of education, the Government of Uganda has taken affirmative action to increase the rates of enrolment at the national university and other institutions of higher learning. As a result, there has been a record increase in female enrolment from 25 per cent to 33 per cent at the university while at some of the colleges, particularly agricultural colleges, 50 per cent of the vacancies are reserved for female applicants, and this is to continue until gender parity is achieved.

I wish to emphasize that this initiative is part of a steady movement towards the achievement of a critical mass of women at the decision-making and managerial levels, in the political field and in public service. What we need is not only a few women who make history but a critical mass that effects change at all levels.

The decade has also witnessed the review and reform of discriminatory laws, particularly the law on rape and defilement.

In addition to affirmative action, the Government of Uganda has taken steps to ensure the positive integration of women and gender issues in the mainstream of all development processes. The integration strategy is implemented at two levels: at the national level, through the national gender policy framework and at the sectoral level through sector-specific gender-oriented policy. At both levels, guidelines for mainstreaming gender issues are provided, policy reviews carried out and training in gender analysis skills implemented.

These interventions are meant to provide a framework which all government structures and development partners can use to mainstream gender issues in their policies and programmes.

At the community level, Uganda has established local assemblies for women, known as women's councils. The councils have a structure from the grass-roots to the national level and provide local forums for women right from the grass-roots level through which women are mobilized into civic participation.

The whole world now eagerly awaits the outcome of this Conference. While the Conference has provided the international community with an opportunity to reflect on our past achievements and failures with regard to the advancement of women, it should in the same breath endeavour to provide solutions.

The challenge is to have the Platform for Action translated into concrete programmes that will achieve tangible results for all women at all levels. We should continue to "maternize" globally but act locally.

The most crucial area is that of functional literacy for women in the developing world. To make an illiterate woman history, we must make sure the girl child is guaranteed relevant education to equip her with the skills necessary for survival in this competitive world.

We must advocate further affirmative action for women with disabilities and women belonging to ethnic and religious minorities.

All this needs money. Women must have money, but money will continue to be an illusion if we promote micro-projects for small groups of women. Money is power.

It is well known that those with economic power control others at the international, regional and national levels.

The economic emancipation of women will call forces to the balance even at the family level. This may be the recipe for peace.

We must have regional financial facilities for women from which similar institutions at the national level will draw funds to finance tangible economic projects in the hands of women. We must not forget the old English saying that whoever pays the piper calls the tune.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. We must stop kidding ourselves that power is given on a silver platter all the time. We must not underestimate the political power of women - it lies in our vote - "Eyesitukidde, tanywa matabangufu. Mwene Nkovu, namanha bwesiigha".

The strategy to end our woes is to vote for capable gender-sensitive women and capable gender-sensitive men. Then we shall stop begging.

Statement by Nguyen Thi Binh, Vice-President of Viet Nam

I will begin by saying how happy I am to be here today, in the company of thousands of women who have come to Beijing as part of their quest for equality, development and peace. In particular, I commend the immense efforts of the People's Republic of China which have rendered possible the convening of our important Conference and the vast forum of non-governmental organizations. I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to the Government of China for its invitation and for the warm hospitality I have received. At this final world assembly of women to be held in the twentieth century, let us try together to pave the way towards a twenty-first century that is more peaceful, more equitable and more prosperous, and let us respond to the appeal issued by the United Nations on its fiftieth anniversary: "United for a better world" - a better world for women as well as for mankind as a whole.

My country, Viet Nam, is all too well known for its tumultuous and painful odyssey through the decades of wars which have ravaged our poor land and left in their wake millions of widows, orphans and disabled and missing persons. Within their people, the women of Viet Nam have been shaped by ordeals and multiple vicissitudes, which have brought to the fore their exceptional capacity for endurance and perseverance, their ability to survive and maintain intact their identity despite the tempests, like the pliable but resistant bamboos of my country, which bend in the wind but do not break, and then straighten again, as upright and proud as before.

How can one explain what we, side by side with our menfolk, have been able to accomplish without mentioning the other strength which the women of Viet Nam have drawn from their singular past? I am referring to a remarkable aptitude for taking control of their own destinies and displaying initiative and creativity in all, even the most difficult, circumstances.

Observers are in agreement, however, that the Vietnamese people, both men and women, while maintaining strong attachments to the past, are more forward-looking than backward-looking. Today's Vietnamese women are absorbed in the task of restoring and developing their country. To perform this work, they call on the two main qualities they displayed in wartime: endurance and perseverance, together with the determination to shape their own destiny. As a result, they are involved as active agents in the process of reform and renewal by which Viet Nam is overcoming the after-effects of war and emerging from its state of poverty to become part of the outside world.

It is nevertheless my firm belief, formed as a result of my experience as Minister of Education and Training and reinforced by a host of conferences and symposiums and a variety of studies and surveys at the national, regional and international levels, that these twin assets of Vietnamese women will not be fully exploitable as long as women lack the powerful and intensive catalyst of education. We must therefore venture to undertake the education of women and especially of girls. I have not the least doubt that, once the women of Viet Nam in general are endowed with knowledge and expertise, they will voluntarily become a mainstay of socio-economic development in their country and will be able to play a noble part in the national enterprise of constructing a desirable future for Viet Nam.

Such are the reflections, straight from the heart, which I wanted to share with you. I also wish to take this opportunity to reiterate to friends, past and present, the sincere gratitude of the people and women of Viet Nam for their friendship, support and assistance.

Annex III

CLOSING STATEMENTS

Statement by Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Secretary-General of the United Nations*

Although I cannot be with you today, I have followed the developments of this Conference with the closest attention. From New York, I say to all of you, delegates, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and Secretariat: Congratulations!

All of us owe a debt of gratitude to the People's Republic of China. China has hosted one of the largest global conferences ever held, with some 17,000 participants, including 6,000 delegates from 189 countries, over 4,000 representatives of accredited non-governmental organizations, a host of international civil servants and about 4,000 media representatives. More than 30,000 people also participated in the NGO Forum. Thank you, China, for being hosts to the world.

My special thanks go to the President of the Conference, Madame Chen Muhua. Over the years, as we met in Cairo and Beijing, every encounter with Madame Chen Muhua strengthened my admiration for her calm efficiency and her capacity to solve problems almost before they arose. Madame Chen Muhua, you are the model of the strong and committed woman who will ensure the lasting and influential success of this Conference.

I thank the Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Mrs. Gertrude Mongella. She has been the driving force of this Conference. In the difficult days of the preparatory meetings, in negotiations with national delegations, Mrs. Mongella, through her commitment to the cause of women, through her experience as a negotiator, kept the world on track to Beijing. I am confident of her continued devotion to this cause, as we go forward to implement the decisions reached in Beijing.

Now the momentum of Beijing must be translated into concrete action. We must all ensure that the decisions reached here will change the world.

The commitments made in Beijing are not only the result of diplomatic negotiation. Behind them lies the strong and organized power of the women's movement. The entire continuum of global conferences and summits has been shaped by the growing influence, passion and intellectual conviction of the women's movement.

At Rio, Vienna, Cairo and Copenhagen the importance of issues related to the improvement of the status of women was stressed. From each of these global conferences emerged a more powerful recognition:

- Of the crucial role of women in sustainable development and protecting the environment;

- Of the human rights of women as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights;

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* The statement was made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on behalf of the Secretary-General.

- Of violence against women as an intolerable violation of these rights;

- Of health, maternal care and family planning facilities, and of access to education and information, as essential to the exercise by women of their fundamental rights.

In the United Nations, the women's movement has a staunch ally. Starting from the assertion in the Charter, calling for full equality of men and women, the United Nations has worked with the women's movement to realize this goal of our founders. The Commission on the Status of Women was one of the first bodies established by the United Nations after its foundation. Over the past 20 years, world conferences on women, held in Mexico City, Copenhagen and Nairobi, have contributed to the progressive strengthening of the legal, economic, social and political dimensions of the role of women. In 1979, the General Assembly adopted the landmark Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The movement for gender equality the world over, has been one of the defining developments of our time. I am proud and honoured that the United Nations has been part of this movement.

Despite the progress made, much, much more remains to be done. While women have made significant advances in many societies, women's concerns are still given second priority almost everywhere. Women face discrimination and marginalization in subtle as well as in flagrant ways. Women do not share equally in the fruits of production. Women constitute 70 per cent of the world's poor.

The sign at the entrance to the NGO Forum at Huairou calls on us to "look at the world through women's eyes". For the past two weeks, the world has done just that. We have seen that, despite the progress made since the First World Conference on Women, 20 years ago, women and men still live in an unequal world. Gender disparities and unacceptable inequalities persist in all countries. In 1995 there is no country in the world where men and women enjoy complete equality.

The message of this Conference is that women's issues are global and universal. Deeply entrenched attitudes and practices perpetuate inequality and discrimination against women, in public and private life, on a daily basis, in all parts of the world. At the same time, there has emerged a consensus that equality of opportunity for all people is essential to the construction of just and democratic societies for the twenty-first century. The fundamental linkages between the three objectives of the Conference - equality, development and peace - are now recognized by all.

The Platform for Action has emerged from a preparatory process more participatory and inclusive than any in history. Never before have so many women, representing both Governments and non-governmental organizations, gathered to share experiences and chart the way ahead. The United Nations has provided the venue and the framework to move issues of gender equality to the top of the global agenda. The women of the world have been the driving force to shape this agenda and move it forward.

The Platform for Action is a powerful agenda for the empowerment of women. It calls for the integration of gender perspectives in all policies and programmes. It focuses on concrete measures to address the critical areas of concern worldwide. The Platform for Action must be our guide and constant point

of reference. I ask that it receive wide dissemination globally, regionally and locally. The implementation of its goals, objectives and measures must be actively monitored. And it must be further strengthened, as needed, to take account of new developments as they emerge.

As we set out on the road from Beijing, the Platform is a call for concrete action to make a difference:

- Action to protect and promote the human rights of women and the girl child as an integral part of universal human rights;
- Action to eradicate the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women;
- Action to remove the obstacles to women's full participation in public life and decision-making, at all levels, including the family;
- Action to eliminate all forms of violence against women;
- Action to ensure equal access for girl children and women to education and health services;
- Action to promote economic autonomy for women, and ensure their access to productive resources;
- Action to encourage an equitable sharing of family responsibilities.

The Platform for Action places heavy responsibilities on the United Nations system. It calls upon United Nations organizations to play a key role in follow-up, implementation and monitoring. It poses a challenge to the capacity and commitment of the United Nations. As Secretary-General, I accept that challenge. I will ensure that the recommendations addressed to me are implemented swiftly and effectively. I am committed to placing the gender perspective into the mainstream of all aspects of the work of the Organization. I will work with my colleagues, the executive heads of the United Nations specialized agencies and the United Nations programmes and funds, to ensure a coordinated system-wide response, integrating the follow-up of this Conference with that of other global conferences. And I will keep Member States regularly informed of the progress that is made.

Executive heads of the organizations of the United Nations system have expressed their commitment to the advancement of women in the secretariats of the system as a policy priority. They have all committed themselves to developing specific policies and monitoring mechanisms to improve the status of women and, in particular, to increase the number of women in senior and policy-making positions.

The United Nations system is already active on a number of fronts that will prove critical to the implementation of the Platform: reversing the trend towards the feminization of poverty; raising the educational levels and health standards of women and girls; expanding legal protection for women in the home; establishing stronger protection for women in times of war. All these must be given priority.

I call on all Governments that have not yet done so, to accede to and ratify United Nations human rights instruments and labour conventions - in

particular, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In conclusion, let me emphasize the institutions of civil society that have played such an important role in preparing for this Conference. Since I assumed the office of Secretary-General, I have spoken often of the evolution of civil society and its importance for economic, cultural and democratic advancement. More effective mechanisms to ensure partnership between Governments and civil society will contribute significantly to the implementation of the policies and measures that are called for in the Platform. The United Nations will intensify the close ties and working relationships that already exist with the community of non-governmental organizations at the global and national levels. The United Nations will be prepared to support Governments in their endeavours to foster and strengthen the institutions of civil society.

In a few weeks, the leaders of the world will meet at United Nations Headquarters in a Summit of Heads of State and Government. There they will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations.

As the world celebrates this anniversary, let us work together to ensure that the equal rights of men and women, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, become a reality.

Let us work together to implement the Platform for Action adopted here at Beijing.

Let us tell the world - and let us tell it with pride: the empowerment of women is the empowerment of all humanity!

Statement by Gertrude Mongella, Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women

As I rise to make my closing remarks at this most special of all United Nations world conferences, I cannot help but heave a big sigh of relief. Relief, not because the numerous meetings, consultations and events associated with the Fourth World Conference on Women are officially over, but relief and happiness that we have made it - we have made it! We have managed to transcend historical and cultural complexities; we have managed to transcend socio-economic disparities and diversities; we have kept aflame our common vision and goal of equality, development and peace. In a number of areas, we have significantly expanded the horizons of previous conferences. Finally, we have managed to achieve our consensus document - the Platform for Action - a task that was accomplished through the hard work and cooperative spirit, dedication and determination of Governments and other groups represented here.

It is a wonderful feeling. I am sure that we all share this moment, for which we have all diligently worked from all levels. We all contributed our part so we can all join together to celebrate our common achievement of today in the same spirit of solidarity which guided our activities and actions up to, and including, Beijing. Each and every one of us has contributed time, energy and vision to enable us all to arrive at this critical turning-point in the history of humanity. I thank you all sincerely.

To our hosts, the Government and people of China, no words can adequately express my gratitude for the physical infrastructure you placed at our disposal; for the moral and friendly support you provided to make us feel we are at home

here; for the untiring efforts you made to secure and protect us; and also for the many spectacular entertainments and events arranged for participants in both the NGO Forum and the Conference. Thank you. For all these, we are especially grateful to the China Organizing Committee and the All-China Women's Federation and all the volunteers for their dedication and commitment and for the smooth coordination of all the preparatory arrangements.

The 1995 NGO Forum on Women, which was held from 30 August to 8 September 1995 to bring together women and men to challenge, create and transform global structures and processes at all levels through the empowerment and celebration of women, brought together over 25,000 women, men and young people to discuss in workshops, symposia and other consultations, different aspects of concerns which tough the very lives of women. Some of the debates that took place generated animosity, which reflects divergent views and the difficult process of consensus-building. But do we know of any conferences that did not have these impassioned debates?

The all-inclusive celebrations of women's work which took place at Huairou helped to cement the bonds and networking among women from all corners of the globe. I thank the organizers of the 1995 NGO Forum for their drive, dedication and support.

To the Secretary-General, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who has been with us from the very beginning, I thank him for his support and for placing his trust in me. I thank him also for committing himself to the follow-up actions to meet the aspirations of so many, many women - and he has done so.

I also take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the entire Secretariat of the United Nations as well as to colleagues from other United Nations agencies, organizations and bodies, who are too many to enumerate here, for their unflinching support. Had it not been for their hard work throughout the preparatory process and certainly in Beijing, the Conference would not have proceeded as smoothly as it did.

I thank and bless young people. You have been with us throughout. It is you, with your creativity, courage, energy and vision, who will make us move forward. For, as I have said before, young people own the future and you have a right to own the actions of Beijing. We will, therefore, rely on you to carry on the revolution!

And now we have our Platform, a platform from which we should manage the changes expected of us. We owe much to the able chairmanship of Mme Chen Muhua, President of the Conference; Dr. Patricia Licuanan, Chairperson of the Main Committee; Obaapanyin Nana Ama Yeboaa, Chairperson of Working Group I; Ms. Irene Freudenschuss-Reichl, Chairperson of Working Group II, and all the others, whose efforts have facilitated the process towards the adoption of this Platform. We now have in our hands the mandates for which we have been working; our legitimate basis to demand change. Our Platform, which represents a global consensus for social change, cannot now be hidden away and allowed to collect dust.

The Fourth World Conference on Women is concluded, but the real work of transforming words into action is only now beginning. Let the spirit of organization and goal-setting which marked the preparatory phase of this Conference become the energy to propel implementation. Let the diversities of women now be channelled into making women indeed the greatest multipliers of prosperity rather than the greatest victims of poverty.

We have taken a decisive, irreversible step forward; there is no going back. The strands for weaving a better world for humanity are here; let us, therefore, act, and act now. While I do not wish to underestimate the problems which would accompany the implementation of the Platform, I believe firmly that if we all do our little bit, no matter how small it is, we shall succeed in making even the impossible, possible.

For, as our Chinese hosts say, the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. The journey will not, however, be on super-highways on which we can gear up at full speed: it might rather take us over seas and lakes; over hills, mountains and valleys; it will take us many years of hard work and sacrifice to journey to the end. We may have to rest a little at rest-stops when the going gets tough so that we can refuel, refresh and redirect ourselves. Social justice demands that we move on. Not even when we stray a little away from our course can we reverse the social revolution that has been launched.

Let Beijing be the first step of our thousand miles to implement the attainment of true equality, development and peace in the world. Let Beijing be the Platform from which our global crusade will be carried forward. Let us all commit ourselves, as we have been doing all along, to carrying the spirit and hopes of Beijing to all women, men and the young in our hamlets, villages, towns and cities in every nation of the globe. Disseminate the Platform on your return home to your countries and let the message be loud and clear - action now.

The eyes of the world are upon us. The world will hold us accountable for the implementation of the good intentions and decisions arrived at in Beijing. I therefore charge you to reassemble in your ranks, sharpen your focus and march on. Let us ensure that we carry the torch which was lit in Mexico, and rekindled in Copenhagen and Nairobi, further forward from Beijing. We shall surely get there!

Statement by Gro Harlem Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway

We came here to answer the call of billions of women who have lived, and of billions of women who will live. We now need a sea change: women will no longer accept the role of second-rate citizens.

Our generation must answer that call. Undoubtedly, we have moved forward. But the measure of our success cannot be fully assessed today. It will depend on the will of us all to fulfil what we have promised.

The views expressed here - and the news which has escaped from here - will irrevocably shape world opinion. The story of Beijing cannot be untold.

What will be remembered? Zealous security? The palms of policemen? Visas not granted? Yes, but such practices cannot, and will not, long endure. Let us today count our strategic victories, not the tactical defeats. What we have achieved is to unbracket the lives of girls and women.

Now we must move on. The history of liberation struggles tells us that life, freedom, equality and opportunity have never been given. They have always been taken.

We cannot maintain the illusion that someone else is going to do the job and establish equality with men. Women, and men working with them, men who understand, must all fight for that freedom.

Today we know that women's contribution to the economy is decisive for growth and social development. We know that countries will continue to live in poverty if women remain under the heel of oppression. We know the costs of continuing genderized apartheid.

Today, there is not a single country in the world - not one - where men and women enjoy equal opportunities. So we must go back from Beijing to the shantytowns of third world megacities, to the croplands at the desert's edge in Africa, and to the indigenous communities of Latin American rain forests. We must go home to change values and attitudes. But not only there: we must go to boardrooms, to the suburbia of Europe and North America, to all of our local communities, to our Governments and to United Nations Headquarters. This is where change is required. Both in the North and in the South.

What must be one to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of generations living and yet unborn? Not only must women become free and equal to make choices about their own lives, not only must women have the right, the formal and protected right, to take part in shaping society, but far more, women must make use of that right. Women power is a formidable force. Women's values have a lot to give.

We need women at all levels of management and government - local as well as national government. We all agree that women must have education, not only experience - but we still are far from a world that makes use of it.

To take one example from the political field, there are cabinets and parliaments in the world with few or even no women. This situation cannot and will not last. And if the transition towards more real political representation is sluggish, affirmative action will work. It did, in Scandinavia.

When I first became Prime Minister, 15 years ago, it was a cultural shock to many Norwegians. Today, four-year-olds ask their mothers, "Can a man be Prime Minister?"

We are adopting a comprehensive Platform for Action. All of its elements are important in this agenda for change. Let me focus on some of its most compelling thrusts.

We agree that women's education is essential. This year's Human Development Report makes it emphatically clear: the economic returns on investing in women's education are fully comparable to those for men. But the social returns from educating women far exceed those of educating men. Schooling of girls is one of the keys to development.

There has been a difficult debate on how Beijing should define the human rights of women. As if there could be one set of human rights for men and another, more restricted one, for women. I even have heard the following allegation from a country not to be named: "The West, to be frank, is attempting to impose its cultural pattern as an international model". This is wrong: most countries today strongly defend their own cultures; and there is more respect and mutual understanding of the value of other cultures and religions than ever before.

But the point is a different one: there are limits to the practices that countries can expect the international community to accept, or condone, even when such practices have deep cultural roots. This is where human rights enter the picture.

Violence against women, including domestic violence, can be said to be part of a "cultural pattern" in most countries, including my own. We receive too many appalling reports of wife-beating. Clearly, freedom from violence and coercion must apply also in the sexual sphere of life. This Conference has rightly made clear what existing human rights must mean in practice.

The State becomes an accomplice if violence against women is seen as a separate cultural category of behaviour extraneous to the realm of justice and law enforcement.

There are stains on the world map of girl-child maltreatment. Genital mutilation of girls is just that. It does not become sacrosanct or elevated beyond the realm of politics, just because that practice can be said to be part of a "cultural pattern".

We are familiar with the terrible discrimination against girls, even before birth. What has obscurely been described as "pre-natal sex selection" and the fatal neglect of infant girls are tragic testimonies.

There are often ancient root causes of such practices. But they are committed by people who live today. Why are there astonishingly more boys than girls in certain countries? The question may be unpleasant for Governments which do not encourage these crimes. But we will all be found guilty if we close our eyes.

Why are girl children given less and poorer food than their brothers? Why do they receive less health care and less education? Why are they subjected to the horrible tradition of sexual exploitation?

Ingrained, centuries-old attitudes are not easily changed, but those that I have mentioned must be. The task requires vigorous action on the part of Governments, religious groups and private, non-governmental organizations.

Greater equality in the family is to the good for men, women and children. The allegation that this Conference is against motherhood and family is plainly absurd.

Today, we recognize that poverty has a gender bias. Increasingly, poverty discriminates between men and women.

The myth that men are the economic providers and women, mainly, are mothers and caregivers in the family has now been thoroughly refuted. This family pattern has never been the norm, except in a narrow middle-class segment.

Women have always worked, in all societies and at all times. As a rule they have worked harder than men and, as a rule, without pay and acknowledgement. Their contribution has been essential to national economies as well as to their families, where women have been the breadwinners, often quite superior to men.

As defined by statistics, societies have often kept women at arm's length. Women who work 10 to 12 hours a day in subsistence agriculture may be registered as "housewives" in the national censuses.

But overlooking women's contribution to the economy has had more severe damaging effects. Often women cannot even obtain a modest loan to become more independent and productive. In many countries, women own nothing, they inherit nothing and are unable to offer security. On top of that, laws often work against them.

Women will not become more empowered merely because we want them to be, but through change of legislation, increased information and redirection of resources.

Ministers of finance and planning may rue their former practice faced with what Beijing says about the economic role of women. Unleashing women from the chains of poverty is not only a question of justice, it is a question of sound economic growth and improved welfare for everyone. It is high time that we genderize development plans and government budgets.

The 20/20 concept is a promising path forward. It requires mutual commitment, the solidarity of the international community and the responsibility of each national Government to provide basic social services. It is not possible to meet the aspirations of our people, nor to fulfil our commitments without allocating at least 20 per cent of national budgets to basic social services. And those 20 per cent need to be genderized.

We learned a lesson at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994. Improving the status of women and sound family planning is the key to lower fertility rates. The risky pattern of "too many, too soon, too late and too close" is also strongly detrimental to the survival of infants and children. There is no morality in condemning women to a life of perpetual child-bearing and fatigue. Where appeals for justice for women have not been listened to, perhaps the necessity of a sounder economy and sounder population trends may.

Fortunately, we managed to erect a dyke against the stormy waves threatening the Cairo consensus. But here in Beijing we managed more than just a defence of past achievements. When I said at the Cairo Conference that, at the very least, we should decriminalize women who had seen no other solution than to go through an abortion, it caused an uproar. I fail to understand why, also here in Beijing, those who speak most vocally for what many of us favour - a caring society where all women can safely have their children - have held so strongly that these most dramatically difficult decisions should be cause for public prosecution.

We should focus on human suffering, not on recrimination against the weakest and most vulnerable.

Every second a baby boy and baby girl are born into this world of diversity and inequality. They all deserve love and care, a future and opportunities. There is nothing so thoroughly, so unconditionally, trusting as the look in the eyes of a newborn girl or boy child. From that privilege we must depart, and make ourselves worthy of the look in those eyes.

Statement by Chen Muhua, President of the Fourth World Conference on Women

Two weeks ago, when I was unanimously elected President of this Conference, I was deeply honoured, but I was also keenly aware of my tremendous responsibility. Today I am delighted and thrilled because our hard work of the past two weeks and all our cooperative efforts have made the Fourth World Conference on Women a resounding success and have brought it to a triumphant conclusion.

Women around the world have been following the Beijing Conference closely, and people in every country have placed tremendous hope in us. And I think we can say that we have not let them down.

The success of the Conference shows that raising the status of women not only gives women a greater voice but is also demanded by the times: it is the common hope of all humankind.

The success of the Conference is indicative of the shared political will and commitment of the world's Governments and the international community to promote gender equality and to strive for equality, development and peace.

The success of the Conference is the result of close cooperation and joint efforts by all participants. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action are the crystallization of all our hard work.

The Fourth World Conference on Women will be regarded by the entire world as a well-organized United Nations conference on an unprecedented scale, and as a milestone in the annals of the world-wide women's movement. It will undoubtedly give a strong impetus to the efforts of the United Nations to promote gender equality and social development. Like the documents adopted by the three previous women's conferences, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by the Conference will provide guidance to Governments and the international community in their efforts to promote gender equality, and like the recent major United Nations conferences on environment and development, population, and social development, they will become key documents in the field of global social development.

In my work as President of the Conference, I have enjoyed the positive support and close cooperation of the other officers of the Conference and members of the Main Committee, all delegations, the United Nations Secretariat and all Conference participants as well as non-governmental organizations. I should like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of them.

Let us continue to maintain this spirit of solidarity and cooperation as we redouble our efforts to enhance the status of women around the world. Once the Conference is over, let us adopt effective measures, turn our resolve into action and make the potential into the actual. Let us join hands to achieve equality, development and peace, to ensure a happy life for future generations and to work together for an even better twenty-first century.

Annex IV

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE COMMONLY UNDERSTOOD MEANING OF THE TERM "GENDER"

1. During the 19th meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women, acting as preparatory body for the Fourth World Conference on Women, an issue arose concerning the meaning of the word "gender" in the context of the Platform for Action of the Conference. In order to examine the matter, the Commission decided to form a contact group in New York, with the Commission's Rapporteur, Ms. Selma Ashipala (Namibia), as Chairperson. The Commission mandated the informal contact group to seek agreement on the commonly understood meaning of "gender" in the context of the Platform for Action and to report directly to the Conference in Beijing.

2. Having considered the issue thoroughly, the contact group noted that: (1) the word "gender" had been commonly used and understood in its ordinary, generally accepted usage in numerous other United Nations forums and conferences; (2) there was no indication that any new meaning or connotation of the term, different from accepted prior usage, was intended in the Platform for Action.

3. Accordingly, the contact group reaffirmed that the word "gender" as used in the Platform for Action was intended to be interpreted and understood as it was in ordinary, generally accepted usage. The contact group also agreed that the present report should be read by the President of the Conference as a president's statement and that the statement should be part of the final report of the Conference.